

**Written Testimony to the Labor and Public Employees Committee  
In Support of S.B. 221, An Act Concerning Paid Family and Medical Leave  
Submitted by Shannon Houston, New Haven  
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Senator Gomes, Representative Tercyak, and members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee, thank you for taking the time to read my testimony. I am writing to urge you to support SB 221, and establish a paid family and medical leave program for Connecticut.

I support SB 221 because it would enable workers to balance caring for their families with the responsibilities of their jobs. Finding such a balance is a challenge we all face, and it is critical not only to parents and their newborn babies, but also to the thousands of people juggling work with the responsibilities of caring for sick or aging family members, or even with their own health needs.

Nearly half of all workers in the U.S., including thousands in Connecticut, are not covered under the federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) because, like me, they work for smaller employers, or are exempt for other reasons. And many of those who *do* have access to the unpaid leave afforded by FMLA often cannot afford to take it because every single paycheck is necessary for their households' survival.

This bill is personally very important to me. My husband and I both work full-time, and we are lucky that we each have access to a few weeks of paid leave each year through our vacation and sick time. However, while we are in our early thirties and would like very much to start a family, the lack of paid maternity leave is one reason we have put off childbearing. We simply can't figure out how we would manage several weeks off without my paycheck. Even if I were able to use all of my saved vacation and sick time after giving birth, it would still only amount to about three weeks of pay, while doctors recommend taking a *minimum* of at least six to eight weeks off after childbirth. That means that even in the best case scenario, taking the minimum amount of leave recommended by a doctor, I'd have to figure out how to go without nearly a month's worth of pay. My husband and I consider ourselves to be

very fortunate compared with so many of our neighbors; we have good jobs with decent salaries that allow us to make ends meet most of the time. But even we can't afford to miss a month or more of pay. Considering the high cost of daycare, we're going to need every penny we can get as it is. So, we wait. Eventually, I suppose we'll take the leap, and just hope we make it to the other side somehow.

If this system is created, it would position Connecticut as a national leader on this issue; only 12% of workers in the United States have access to any amount of paid maternity leave. In fact, the U.S. is the only advanced country *without* paid maternity leave. Both babies and parents would benefit from additional time to adjust, heal, and bond – time that can never be taken back once it's gone. Employers would benefit when they welcome back happier, healthier, more well-rested employees. Our state's economy would benefit, too, because parents would be able to keep their jobs, continue paying their rents, mortgages, and bills, and purchase the necessities required for those first critical months of a newborn's life.

While paid maternity leave is one of my personal reasons for supporting this bill, it is not the only one. The fact is that *everyone in our state would benefit from a system of paid family and medical leave at some point in their lives*: the baby boomer, like my mom, who still works full-time but must also care for her elderly mother; the husband who must drive his wife to chemotherapy treatments; the worker who must take time away from work to heal from an unexpected surgery or illness. None of us can predict life's ups and downs. By contributing just a small fraction of each paycheck, everyone in Connecticut would gain the security and peace of mind that they will be able to care for their loved ones, and themselves, when life happens. And that kind of security is priceless.

For the future of everyone in our state, please support SB 221, and make Connecticut a national leader on this issue. Thank you.